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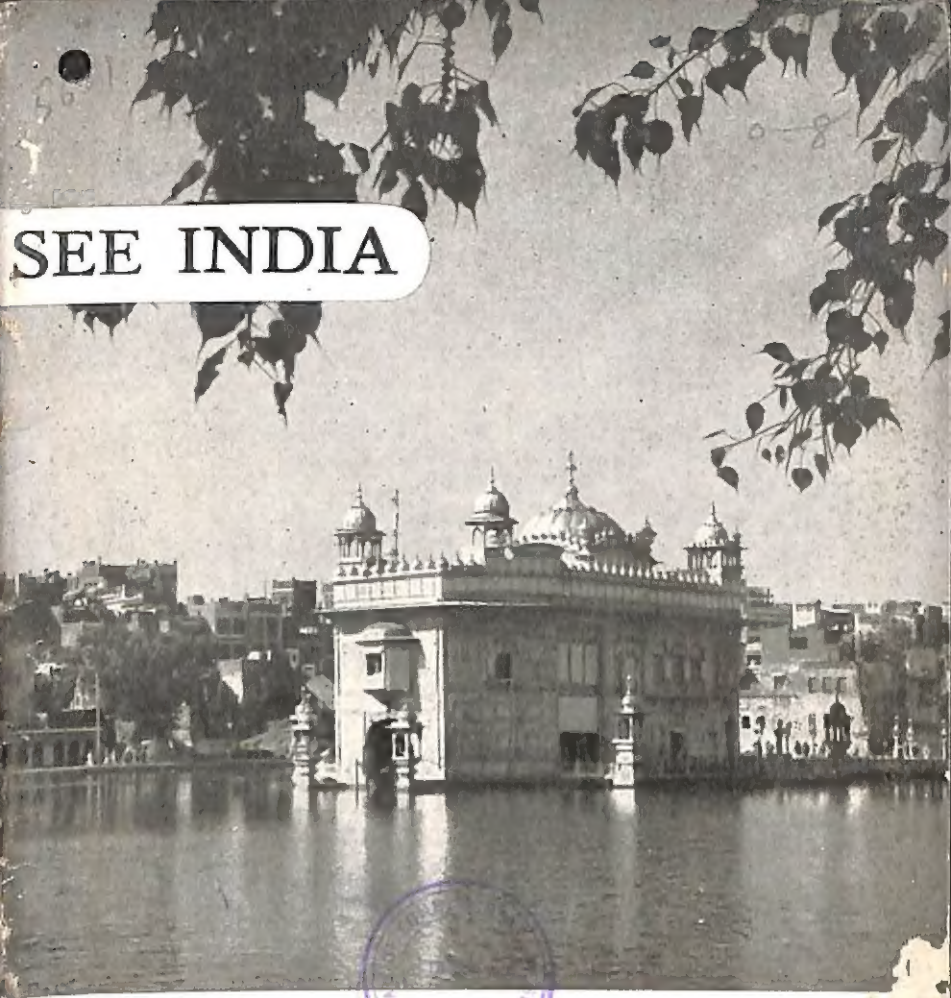

The Golden Temple

AMRITSAR

March
1954

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   Esplanade Mansions, Calcutta. (Tel. Bank 2821)
3. Regional Tourist Officer,
   88, Queensway, New Delhi. (Tel. 42742)
4. Regional Tourist Officer,
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JUN 1956

AMRITSAR

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The Golden Temple

AMRITSAR

AMRITSAR is situated in the north-west of the Punjab (India) at a distance of only sixteen miles from Wagah, the outpost of the Indo-Pakistan border. With a population of about 400,000, Amritsar is on the link road which formerly used to connect Delhi with Lahore and Peshawar. Before the partition of India in 1947, Amritsar occupied almost a central position in the undivided province of the Punjab and was one of the biggest trade centres in Northern India. But after the partition it has become a border town not only of East Punjab, but of India as well. Due to this change Amritsar has lost some of its previous trade and this, in turn, has affected the economy of the city in several ways. Nevertheless, Amritsar still remains the most important, the largest and, perhaps, the most picturesque city in East Punjab.

Brief History

The literal meaning of the word Amritsar is 'the pool of nectar.' The town came into being in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, under the inspiration of Ramdas and Arjun, the fourth and fifth

Sikh Gurus or Apostles of Sikhism. Sikhism originated in the Punjab in the monotheistic and ethical teachings of Guru Nanak (1469-1539). The early influences of the Sikh religion were confined to a small area in Central Punjab of which Amritsar became the focal point in later history. Guru Ramdas, in his desire to create a central place of pilgrimage for the Sikhs, decided on building a magnificent temple. Before the construction actually started, he ordered a pool to be made around this proposed temple. In this picturesque setting, under the guidance of the Guru, congregations met for prayer. As the place soon became a busy resort of pilgrims, a town naturally sprang up around it.

Guru Ramdas' son, Guru Arjun, the fifth in the Apostolic line, planned to make the spot still more beautiful. He decided to develop the shrine and the town on a larger scale. Consequently, he constructed a temple on the spot, in the middle of the sacred pool, where the famous Golden Temple stands today. Legend has it that the foundation of this temple was laid by Hazrat Sheikh Mian-Mir of Lahore, a pious Muslim who was a great friend and admirer of the Guru. Within this temple Guru Arjun ordered the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy Sikh scripture, to be placed, where it has been kept ever since. To this day verses from the sacred book are recited daily. Relays of musicians participate, everyday, in eighteen hour long sessions, when devotional hymns from the Granth Sahib are sung. The town, which sprang up around the Temple, soon grew into a centre of trade since it

The Golden Temple with the lake in foreground

was conveniently situated on the routes connecting India with Kabul, Kashmir and Tibet. Very soon the place acquired a two-fold importance; it became a religious centre as well as a centre of trade.

The Golden Temple

This Temple has had a somewhat chequered history during the days of the Punjab feudatories. But later when the Sikhs asserted their supremacy, the pool and the Temple were restored to their original grandeur and since then, the place has continued to grow in beauty. During the days of Ranjit Singh, the lower half of the Temple was decorated with marble

while the entire upper half was inlaid with copper surmounted with a thin plate of gold. Hence its name, the Golden Temple. The Sikhs call it Hari Mandir (The Temple of the Lord) or Darbar Sahib (The Court Divine).

The Temple, surrounded by the pool, presents unusual beauty when its glimmering reflection is caught by the myriad ripples dancing around it. At night the Temple and the causeway leading upto it are brightly lit. Many parts of the Temple, including the causeway and the Path of Peregrination around the pool, are paved with marble slabs covering a total area of more than 10,000 square yards. This marble was offered at the Temple by Sikh and Hindu devotees. The entrance to the Temple is now being reconstructed with the help of voluntary contributions of Sikhs from all over the world. As one faces the Temple from the city square, an imposing structure surmounted by a clock-tower confronts one. On approaching the marble portico with its silver doors, one notices a tall flag-mast with its saffron ensign of the Sikhs. Inside the portico, there is the large kettle-drum announcing morning and evening prayers.

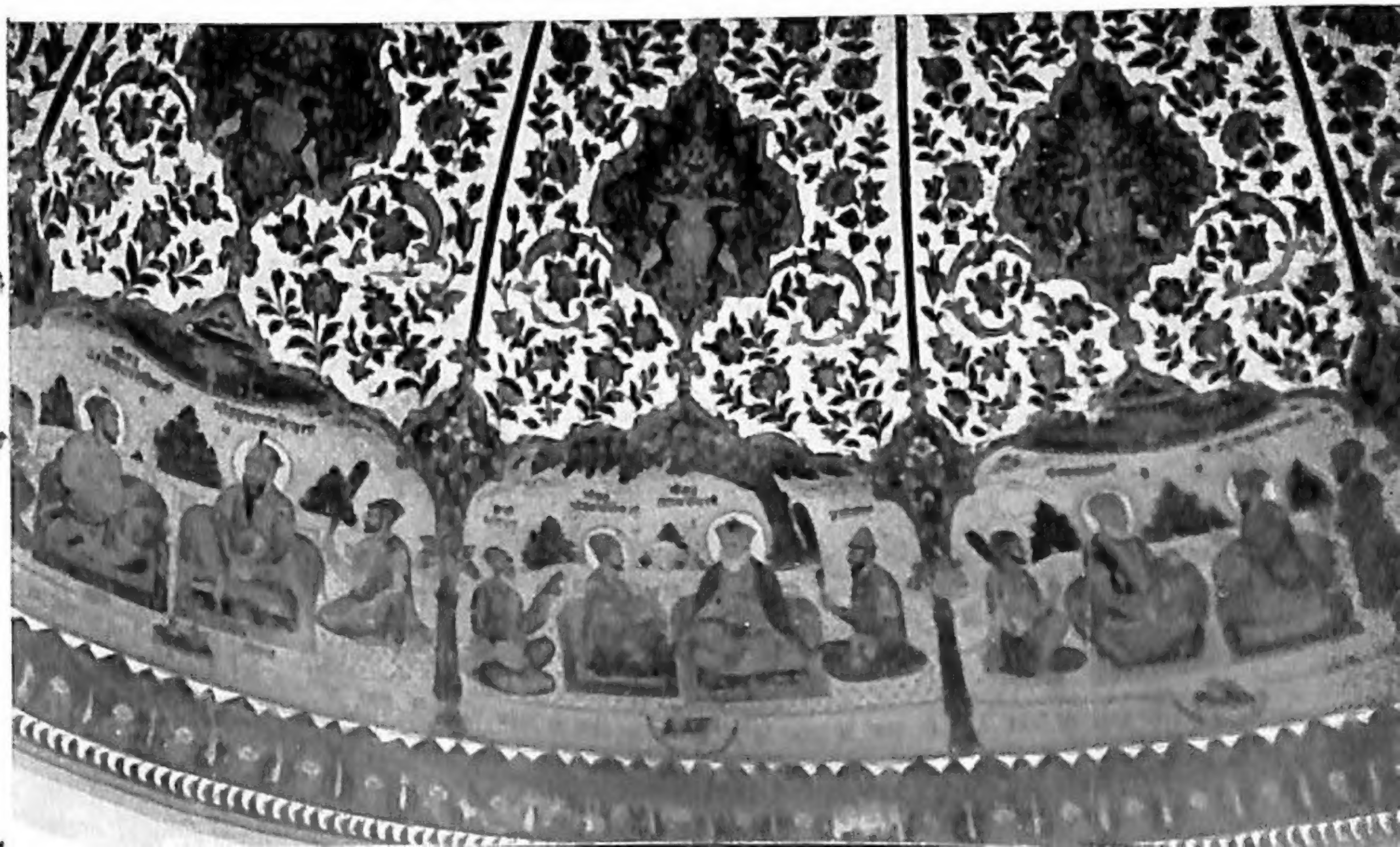
The Temple is three-storeyed, the top being a canopied gilded dome surrounded by golden turrets. On the ground floor are the sacred Book, the chorus of devotional music and the ceremony of worship and offering. The first floor has a balcony round an open courtyard which has walls rising up to the base of the dome. Here too prayers are offered. The inside of the Temple contains fine filigree and enamel work

in gold and is a rare example of its kind. On the ground floor the walls are similarly decorated with filigree work. There is also some fresco work done in lime, a process which is the speciality of the local artists. On the outer walls of the Temple one can see marble slabs inlaid with precious stones. Some of the old frescoes which have been threatened by the passage of time, are preserved behind transparent glass.

Inside the Sanctuary

The Temple is open to people of all creeds but there is a well-defined code of decorum for the visitors. At the outer gate when one steps into the peregrination path, one proceeds down the steps either bare-foot or with special shoe-covers made of cloth. At the Temple

A fresco from the Golden Temple



altar, every visitor is expected to make a token offering of money or flowers and receives blessing or *prasad*. One may go round the Temple or sit inside for a while to listen to the devotional music. The manner of worship is a reverential low bow to the sacred Book. However, Sikh devotees take a dip in the sacred pool also. Tobacco, cigarettes, cigars or any article pertaining to smoking must not be carried into the Golden Temple. Similarly, any kind of liquor is forbidden. Also, as a sign of respect one must not be bare headed.

On special occasions, e.g. birthday anniversaries of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Ram Das, the founder of Amritsar, and other Sikh Gurus, the Golden Temple is specially illuminated and there is a fire works display. On Dewali night also, there is a similar display. Huge crowds assemble to witness these illuminations.

Other Buildings

At a distance of about 50 yards, facing the portico of the Golden Temple and across a marble paved square, is the Akal Takht or the Immortal Throne, a building of historical significance for the Sikhs. This is the seat of Sikh theocratic authority where all decisions pertaining to the religious and social life of the Sikhs are taken. For sometime it served as the throne where the Sikh Gurus, assuming regal state, held court. Here also, music plays constantly and offerings are made. Historic weapons used in the past by the Sikh Gurus, and some old and beautiful jewellery

donated to the Temple by the Sikh rulers of the Punjab are kept here. These jewels and weapons are exhibited only on special occasions though, at times, special permission may be granted for exhibiting them.

Another edifice worth visiting, situated at a distance of about 300 yards, is the famous tower of Baba Atal. This tower was erected in the memory of Baba Atal Rai, son of Hargobind, the sixth Guru. He is said to have performed a miracle for which he was reprimanded by his father. Baba Atal Rai realised his error and laid down his life. This tower was erected on the exact spot where he died. This is an octagonal nine-storeyed structure, 112 feet in circumference at the base, and 150 feet high. Its inner architecture follows the same pattern as the other religious buildings in this area—that is, marble at the base and gold filigree work at the top. Here too the sacred Book of the Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib is kept and the same propriety is observed as in the other religious places. Another sacred tank called Kaulsar faces the tower of Baba Atal. Near this, in the *serai* of Guru Ram Das, free food is distributed at mid-day to the poor out of a large assignment from the Managing Committee of these shrines.

Very near the tower of Baba Atal stands the office of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, a statutory society which manages, on a democratic basis, Sikh shrines all over the country. Next to it is the *serai* named after Guru Ram Das which provides free accommodation to a large number of pilgrims. The *serai* houses a well-equipped research library. Around

it are old and historic mansions called 'Bungas', built in the last century by wealthy Sikh Chieftains. Some of them are important as centres of religious studies, historical research and propagation of Sikhism.

Just across the road from the Golden Temple is the famous street, Bazar Mai Sewan. Here one can find curios made specially in Amritsar, including ivory handicrafts, etc. Also, books both old and new on Sikh religion and Punjabi literature, and pictures depicting scenes from the history of the Sikhs can be bought. A little beyond is Guru Bazar, so called because it was one of the markets established by Guru Arjun, founder of the Temple. It is now mainly a shopping centre for gold and other jewellery.

There are other historic places, relics and places of interest which will be pointed out to the visitor by official guide appointed by the Managing Society of the Temple for the convenience of the tourist.

Jallianwala Bagh

About two furlongs from the Golden Temple is the world-famous Jallianwala Bagh. It was here that General Dyer, on April 13, 1919, ordered firing on a peaceful crowd of Indians participating in a political meeting. About 1,500 to 2,000 people were killed or wounded. This incident was followed by large scale repression, the clamping of martial law in Amritsar and other towns and the notorious 'crawling' order. This accentuated a political awakening in India and it brought Mahatma Gandhi to the forefront of the

The Memorial Well at Jallianwala Bagh

Indian political life. The bullet marks on the boundary wall of this large enclosed garden can be seen to this day, as also the well into which so many helpless people are said to have jumped in order to escape the volleys being fired. Jallianwala Bagh, a spacious and well-laid park, is now the centre of the political and social life of Amritsar.

The Rambagh Gardens

Outside the city is the historic Rambagh Garden—a large and well kept park. Several clubs are situated in it. It also contains the well-known Summer Palace

of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, ruler of the Punjab from 1799 to 1839.

Near it is the Glancy Medical College, and Pingalwara, a home for lepers and disabled people.

Khalsa College

Three miles west of the City is the Khalsa College. This is an Arts and Science College of the Sikhs though it is open to people of all creeds. It is a large building with extensive playgrounds and lawns and a fine open swimming pool. The College was established in 1893

The Rambagh Gate

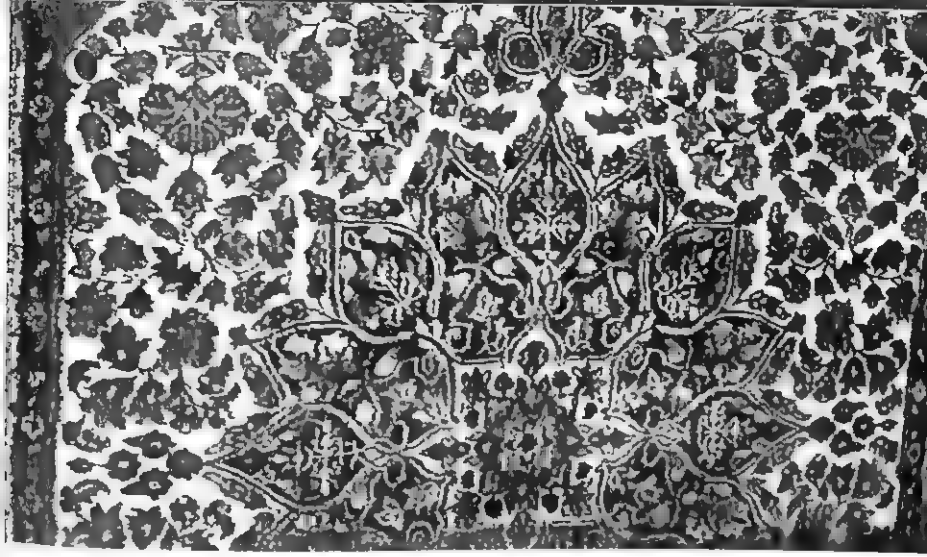
The Khalsa College

through the initiative of the British Government and some Sikh social workers with funds contributed by the Sikh princes and nobles.

The Durgiana Temple

This temple, situated outside the Lohgarh Gate, is a partial replica of the Golden Temple. It is a Hindu Temple, sacred to the Goddess Durga. It was made in comparatively recent time and is situated in the middle of a pool of water.

The Durgiana Temple



Traditional design on an Amritsar carpet

The Northern Indian Academy of Fine Arts

Situated close to the Civil Hospital, on the way to the Rambagh Garden, this Hall is a centre of Indian Art. Exhibitions of various schools of Indian art are held here from time to time. It is a rewarding place to visit for anyone interested in the study of Indian Art.

The East India Carpet and Woollen Mills

This factory, situated five miles west on the road to the Pakistan border, was established in the days of the East India Company. It has turned out beautiful shawls and carpets for nearly a century which have been appreciated in the world market and have made Amritsar famous.

A carpet maker

The Kashmir Emporium

The Kashmir Emporium is on the road leading to the law courts. Finely worked handicrafts from the renowned valley of Kashmir are exhibited here for sale. Of special interest to the tourists, the

Emporium offers beautiful papier mache, carved woodwork and pashminas.

The Saragarhi Gurdwara

Situated near the statue of Queen Victoria, this memorial was erected by the British Government in the memory of a band of brave Sikh soldiers who died defending a post against heavy odds, on the North-Western Frontier of India.

Taran Taran

Fifteen miles south of Amritsar is Taran Taran, a

The Gurdwara at Taran Taran

town famous for its Sikh Temple. It was also founded by Guru Arjun Singh and is an ancillary to Amritsar. Like Amritsar, Taran Taran has a temple which resembles the Golden Temple of Amritsar in many ways. It has a pool larger than the one at Amritsar. There is a home for lepers, also established by Guru Arjun Singh.

Places to stay in Amritsar

Amritsar Hotel, half a mile from the Railway Station.

Imperial Hotel, half a mile from the Railway Station, and embarking place for the civil aerodrome.

Foreign Banks operating in Amritsar

1. The Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China (in Hall Bazar).
2. The Lloyds Bank (near the Victoria Statue).

CORRECTION

On page 18, please *read* Guru Arjun Dev *for* Guru Arjun Singh.

The Akal Takht

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